

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4773

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINR, SY, LE, US, EG, XF

SUBJECT: SYRIAN MINISTER'S VIEWS ON DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: SYRIAN MINISTER OF CULTURE KAYYALI CONSIDERS SYRIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE PALESTINIANS, EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA HAVE TAKEN A TURN FOR THE BETTER. SOVIETS ARE UNHAPPY WITH ASAD'S LEBANON POLICY BUT HAVE PROBABLY NOT DELIVERED ANY "ULTIMATUM." HE URGES USG TO PLAY A BACKSTAGE ROLE ENCOURAGING INCREASED EGYPTIGN AND SAUDI SUPPORT FOR SYRIA. END SUMMARY

2. NASSERIST MINISTER OF CULTURE FAWZI KAYYALI TOLD ME JULY 20 HE FELT THAT SYRIA'S SITUATION VIS-A-VIS LEBANON, THE PALESTINIANS AND THE OTHER ARAB NATIONS HAD IMPROVED
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OVER WHAT THEY WERE A MONTH AGO. HE ATTRIBUTED THIS BOTH

TO A MORE EFFECTIVE SYRIAN EFFORT TO EXPLAIN ITS POSITION AND TO THE INCREASING DISAFFECTION OVER THE PLO'S INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS ON THE PART OF LEBANESE MUSLIMS AND ABU SALIH'S FACTION OF FATAH.

3. LOOKING BACK, KAYYALI COMMENTED, THE ROOTS OF TODAY'S CRISIS WERE PLANTED IN THE SPRING OF 1973 DURING THE FIRST SERIOUS CLASHES BETWEEN THE LEBANESE ARMY AND THE FEDAYEEN. THEN BEGAN, HE UNDERSTANDS, THE ELABORATE FORTIFICATIONS SUCH AS THOSE CONSTRUCTED AT TEL ZA'TAR. OSTENSIBLY THESE DEFENSES WERE TO PROTECT THE CAMPS BETTER AGAINST ISRAELI ATTACKS BUT THE PALESTINIANS ALSO HAD IN MIND A POSSIBLE SHOWDOWN WITH THE GOL. KAYYALI BLAMES PALESTINIANS MORE THAN THE LEBANESE LEFT FOR THE PRESENT CRISIS. HE CONSIDERS JUMBLATT AND EDDE FOR EXAMPLE HAVE BEEN MANIPULATED BY THE PALESTINIANS. (DAMASCUS 4640 REPORTED SIMILAR COMMENT BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAYDAR.) KAYYALI FOUND IT SIGNIFICANT THAT EDDE HAD NOW OPENLY ATTACKED THE PLO'S INVOLVEMENT IN NATIONAL LEBANESE AFFAIRS.

4. SYRO-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS. KAYYALI SAID HE WAS ENCOURAGED BY SIGNS OF DISINTEGRATION WITHIN THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT AND GROWTH IN THE NUMBERS OF THOSE ELEMENTS WHICH WANTED RECONCILIATION WITH SYRIA. HE WAS UNABLE TO CONFIRM REPORTS THAT KHADDOUMI MIGHT SOON ARRIVE IN DAMASCUS TO PREPARE AN ARAFAT-ASAD MEETING, BUT SAID THAT SUCH TALK INDICATED THAT THE PALESTINIANS WERE BOTH TIRED OF THE CONFLICT AND REALIZED HOW BADLY THEY NEEDED SYRIAN FRIENDSHIP.

5. KAYYALI NOTED THAT ASAD WOULD MAKE A MAJOR ADDRESS JULY 20 ON THE LEBANESE PROBLEM. NO OTHER SYRIAN LEADER, HE NOTED ADMIRINGLY, COULD HAVE GOTTEN AWAY WITH SENDING EVEN ONE SYRIAN SOLDIER INTO LEBANON TO CONFRONT THE PALESTINIANS. KAYYALI, WHO HAS ON EARLIER OCCASIONS PRAISED ASAD'S LEADERSHIP, THIS TIME SAID THAT WERE ASAD TO DISAPPEAR FROM THE SCENE, SYRIA WOULD BE SET BACK 10 YEARS IN TERMS OF ITS POLITICAL STABILITY, ITS READINESS FOR PEACE AND ITS OWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS. CONFIDENTIAL

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6. SYRIAN-ARAB RELATIONS: KAYYALI CONSIDERS THAT RELATIONS WITH BOTH RIYADH AND CAIRO ARE ALSO BETTER TODAY THAN THEY WERE A MONTH AGO. BUT THIS IMPROVEMENT WAS STILL ONLY RELATIVE AND LIMITED. MUCH REMAINED TO BE DONE TO CONSOLIDATE THESE TIES. HE SAID THAT AT THE JULY 19 CABINET MEETING, SEVERAL MINISTERS HAD MADE THE POINT THEY FELT THAT NOT ENOUGH PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE IN IMPLEMENTING UNDER-

TAKINGS MADE AT THE JUNE 23 RIAYDH CONFERENCE. SYRIA, FOR EXAMPLE, HAD SINCE JUNE 23 TOTALLY STOPPED ITS ANTI-EGYPTIAN PROPAGANDA WHILE EGYPT CONTINUED TO CRITICIZE DAMASCUS, THROUGH STATEMENTS BY FONMIN FAHMY AND IN PRESS INTERVIEWS BY PRESIDENT SADAT HIMSELF. ASKED WHICH COUNTRY SYRIA WAS CLOSER TO TODAY, KAYYALI REPLIED THAT SYRIA WAS DEFINITELY ON BETTER TERMS WITH SAUDI ARABIA. AFTER ALL, THERE HAD BEEN NO HOSTILE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN TO BE FORGIVEN SUCH AS SYRIA HAD LAUNCHED AGAINST CAIRO IN THE WAKE OF SINAI II. I NOTED A RECENT NEWS BULLETIN THAT ISRAEL HAD CUSTODY OF A GREEK SHIP WHICH WAS INTERCEPTED CARRYING WEAPONS DESTINED FOR THE PALESTINIANS ONLOADED AT ALEXANDRIA. KAYYALI SAID THAT THE RIYADH CONFERENCE HAD SET A CERTAIN GUIDELINE FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN CAIRO AND DAMASCUS. HE ADDED SMILINGLY, HE THOUGHT THAT AS FAR AS SYRIA WAS CONCERNED THAT PARTICULAR EXAMPLE OF ARMS SMUGGLING FELL WITHIN ACCEPTABLE LIMITS.

7. SAUDI ARABIA, KAYYALI COMMENTED, CAN PLAY IN THE SHORT TERM A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN ENDING THE LEBANESE CRISIS AND IN THE LONGER TERM IN FURTHERING AN ARAB-ISRAELI SETTLEMENT. THIS ROLE, HE MADE CLEAR, WILL CONSIST PRIMARILY OF PAYING OUT A GREAT DEAL OF SAUDI MONEY BUT HE ADDED THAT HE GREATLY RESPECTED CROWN PRINCE FAHD'S ABILITY AND THOUGHT THAT THE USG SHOULD ENCOURAGE FAHD TO BRING HIS DIPLOMATIC SKILLS AS WELL AS HIS CHECKBOOK TO BEAR ON THE PROBLEM.

8. SOVIET ROLE: ASKED ABOUT THE PRESENT STATE OF SYRIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS, KAYYALI REPLIED THEY WERE DISTINCTLY TENSE. HE CONFIRMED REPORT AVAILABLE FROM OTHER SOURCES THAT KHADDAM'S VISIT TO MOSCOW HAD BEEN VERY UNSUCCESSFUL. ONE SIGNAL OF SOVIET UNHAPPINESS WAS THEIR INDEFINITE
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POSTPONEMENT OF AN IMPORTANT SOVIET ECONOMIC DELEGATION DUE HERE JULY 14 AS PREVIOUSLY ARRANGED WITH KOSYGIN IN EARLY JUNE. HE WAS NOT, HOWEVER, AWARE OF ANY "ULTIMATUM" DELIVERED BY THE SOVIET SIDE, AND THOUGHT THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD PROBABLY AVOID BEING TOO HEAVY-HANDED WITH SYRIA, BECAUSE OF THEIR DESIRE TO PRESERVE THEIR INFLUENCE HERE. IN SUM, MOSCOW IS SHOWING IT DOES NOT TRUST HAFEZ AL-ASAD BUT IT PROBABLY INTENDS TO LIMIT ITS OPPOSITION TO HIM LEST IT RISK ALIENATING THE SYRIANS. HAVING IN MODERN TIMES GRAFTED SOCIALISM ONTO ISLAM, SYRIANS WERE CONDITIONED TO BE DOUBLY CAUTIOUS OF COMMUNISM. ASKED ABOUT THE ROLE PLAYED BY CPS CHAIRMAN KHALID BAKDASH, A FELLOW MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE FRONT, KAYYALI SAID THAT BAKDASH WAS FULLY SUPPORTING ASAD'S POLICY TOWARDS LEBANON AND THE

PALESTINIANS. HE AGREED THAT TO SUCCEED AS AN ARAB COMMUNIST LEADER, IT HELPED TO BE SCHIZOPHRENIC.

9. U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS: KAYYALI URGED THAT USG FIND WAYS TO MAXIMUM BOTH SAUDI AND EGYPTIAN SUPPORT FOR ASAD. AT THE SAME TIME, HE CAUTIONED THAT WE NOT PUBLICLY SHOW OUR HAND BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. SYRIANS, HE UNDERLINED, WERE A SUSPICIOUS PEOPLE WITH A BURNING DESIRE TO MAINTAIN THEIR INDEPENDENCE OF ACTION. HAVING BEEN UNDER THE OTTOMAN THUMB FOR 400 YEARS, THEY HAD BEEN "LIBERATED" ONLY TO WATCH THEIR COUNTRY UNDER "SUCCESSIVE AMPUTATIONS WITH THE LOSS OF LEBANON, JORDAN, ALEXANDRETTA AND ISRAEL." THIS HAD CREATED COMPLEXES WHICH ANYONE TRYING TO DEAL WITH SYRIA MUST BEAR IN MIND. THE DEEPLY RELIGIOUS NATURE OF THE SYRIAN PEOPLE MUST ALSO NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.
MURPHY

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